Netwatch

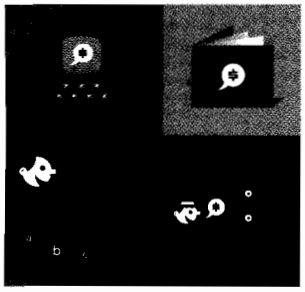
By Jim Carroll

Your guide to business & accounting on the Internet

Check in with the future now

How do you prepare leaders for the future if they don't have any interest in it? That might sound like an interesting question, but I've come to the conclusion, after dealing with hundreds of industries and thousands of executives and professionals, that there are many who love the sentiment once professed by poet Ogden Nash: "progress might have been alright once, but it has gone on too long."

I've learned there are two types of business executives: one type thinks about the future and is forward-oriented. They are innovative, realistic, creative and open to new ways of thinking because they are actively preparing for rapid change in terms of skills, markets and industry fundamentals. Then there are executives who display few of these attributes.



One way the first group moves ahead is by using the Web as a tool to plug into the flood of ideas on innovation. The word "innovation" has gained a great degree of prominence in the past several years as people have come to realize that innovation isn't just about developing products — it's about thinking of how to run a business better, expand and transform.

An excellent site to see the pace of global change and innovation is *Fortune* magazine's business innovation insider blog. It's constantly updated, chockful of information and has a broad depth of coverage.

Determining the change quotient inventory of your organization is a great first step into the future. How do you do this? Consider these six issues:

• **Velocity ratio:** what is the rate of change within your industry? What's the velocity of business model change? How many new competitors are there, and how quickly is the industry blurring as they come into play? What's the staff turnover rate? How quickly do new products come to market?

• **The rate of rising tides:** how fast are customer expectations changing? If you're in an industry in which there are rapidly rising tides in terms of minimum service delivery, there are countless opportunities for innovative, future-oriented products and processes.

• **Innovation index:** is the industry widely innovative or are there only a few who dare to buck the current trend?

• **Retirement rate:** not to be cynical, but how many boomers are hanging around wanting the benefits, salary and executive responsibility without confronting change? This can be one of the key measures for change capability.

• **Generational tolerance:** at the age of 47, I've realized that I've been meeting thousands of 25- to 40-year-old Gen-Xers and younger Gen-Connectors who are frustrated every day because they're stuck in organizations with management that kills ideas. They're full of innovation with no outlet for it. On the other hand, there are industries that tap these sources. Spot the industries that welcome younger people's ideas and you've got an industry with massive agility and a high change quotient.

• **Wisdom wealth:** boomers need not be change barriers; there are some who use their experience — often with exceptionally successful results because of their years in business — to spot and capitalize on opportunity for their industries. These are some of the most powerful organizations on the planet. They've merged the generations and are change masters.

Take time to look at how quickly the future is coming at us today and assess whether you and your organization are ready for it.

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